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A Bath and Always by Khaled Abdallah

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A Bath and Always by Khaled Abdallah

Cover Page Footnote

Special thanks to Uri Horesh, for his help and encouragement in translating these poems.

Nicholas Swett
A Bath

Khaled Abdallah
حمّام

There are no clouds on the way to the water. For I am going to bathe;
my shoulders and torso are two firmaments, like two Berber women
who play upon instruments of wood.

The rain

Dsh-sh-sh

Sh-sh-sh-sh

Sh-sh-sh

The wind.

Like Moses, it splits my back in two. I am a branch of firewood, running from an
ancient fire;

half is split from the rear, revealing the white center of the wood, uninjured.

Nicholas Swett
Always

Khaled Abdallah
امّئاد

The street, now crowded with passers-by and free from any sensation,
was stained like a sycamore tree,

lonely as a palm,

and was always inviting like your mother's laughter.

Yesterday the boys stopped the ball here

for the girl to pass, who gravely counts her dreams...

She was not lazy or defeated. Only slow-moving,

for there is a dream far behind her

that waits for the boys to begin again.

Khaled Abdallah is a poet from Gaza now living in Paris. These poems are from his collection *FM*, which was the winner of the 2001 AM Qattan Foundation poetry prize. Many of the poems in this collection express the influence that conscious disembodiment and physical separation can have on self-reflection.

“A Bath” is a poem of dismemberment. The speaker, bathing in the rain, finds his shoulders and body separated by the rain, his back split in two by the wind. Though he is running from a scalding “ancient fire,” he remains “uninjured” and sees “no clouds on the way to the water.” The speaker voices optimism and strength, despite the vivid and even painful physical experience he is undergoing. The separation of the poem is made all the more vivid by the transition featuring the onomatopoeic sounds of the wind. This centerpiece of the poem visually separates the contrasting images of fire and water. This structural choice organically unites this poem about separation and resilience.

“Always” explores separation through time. The opening of the poem establishes a contrast between a crowded street today and the street as it once was, speckled by playing children. The boys stop their game in awe of a slow-moving girl, who has a “dream far behind her.” Once again, we see a strange displacement: the girl’s dream takes on a life and perspective of its own, and lingers behind her, waiting for this frozen nostalgic moment to end. The title of the piece unites this separation of soul and the separation of time; it suggests that disembodiment and confusing, disjointed perspectives are a constant. That separation from the past, separation from one’s dreams, and separation from oneself are all powerful and valuable reflective experiences.